

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 15 December 2025

Report Title

Library Strategy

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Andrew Bramidge – Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides a review of performance against the 2021–2026 Library Strategy and its associated objectives and performance targets. It establishes that the majority of actions and objectives set out within the Strategy have been achieved, contributing to the Council's wider ambitions for thriving neighbourhoods, cultural engagement, health and wellbeing, and improved digital access.

The report seeks approval to undertake a public consultation on a new Library Strategy for the period 2027–2032 and a future service delivery model for the Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs Service. The consultation will ensure that the new Strategy remains relevant, continues to meet community needs, and aligns with the Council's priorities and national library frameworks, and also meets the statutory service requirements.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the review of performance against the 2021–2026 Library Strategy, including key achievements and challenges identified during the Strategy period.

2. Approve the undertaking of a period of consultation with the public, partners, stakeholders and interested parties on the development of a new Library Strategy for the period 2027–2032 and a future service delivery model for the Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs Service.
3. Agree that a further report be brought to Cabinet following the consultation to present a draft Library Strategy 2027–2032, which will identify potential service improvements and efficiencies.
4. Authorise the Assistant Director of Culture, Sport and Tourism to notify the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) of the intention to consult on the Library Strategy and any potential changes to service provision.

List of Appendices Included:

Appendix 1 – Library Strategy 2021 - 2026

Appendix 2 – Service Offer

Appendix 3 – Library Strategy Performance Against Objectives and Targets

Appendix 4 – Part A – Initial Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 5 – Part B – Equality Analysis Form

Appendix 6 – Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Library Strategy

1 Background

1.1 Purpose of the Report

1.1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Review performance against the 2021–2026 Library Strategy.
- Summarise key achievements and challenges.
- Seek approval to undertake a borough-wide public consultation to inform the development of a new Library Strategy for 2027–2032 and a future service delivery model for Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs.

1.2 Statutory Duty and Local Responsibility

1.2.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council has a statutory duty to provide “a comprehensive and efficient” public library service for all persons desiring to make use of it. While national standards for library provision no longer exist, each library authority is responsible for determining how services are delivered in response to local needs, priorities, and available resources. Library services are now shaped by local policy frameworks and delivered through a range of models, including physical libraries, digital access, and community partnerships. It is therefore essential that decision-making is clear and transparent, supported by robust governance, that service planning is based on an assessment of need, demographic data, and community engagement and that delivery aligns with an approved Library Strategy, ensuring consistency with corporate priorities. The Council must continue to meet its statutory obligations while adapting to changing patterns of use, and financial constraints. This approach ensures that the library service remains sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and expectations of Rotherham residents.

1.2.2 Authorities considering making changes to the provision of their library services are advised to notify the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

1.3 The Current Service Overview

1.3.1 Rotherham’s Library Service operates 15 libraries, including one community-managed site at Brinsworth, which is run by volunteers through the Parish Council. Libraries provide free access to books, e-books, and other loan materials, as well as public computers and internet facilities. To support digital inclusion, an ‘assisted digital’ offer helps customers access Council and partner services if they are unable to self-serve, with support provided by trained staff. Libraries also deliver a

varied programme of activities for children, young people, adults, and families, promoting literacy, learning, and wellbeing. The Service Offer by site can be found in Appendix 2.

- 1.3.2 The service also provides vehicle-based outreach for older residents who cannot easily visit a library, a Schools' Loan Service offering resources to support reading and the wider curriculum, and a digital library provision enabling users to join online and access e-books and other resources remotely.
- 1.3.3 The service currently operates with a net budget of £3 million and an establishment of 78.5 full-time equivalent staff.

1.4 The Current Strategy

- 1.4.1 The current Library Strategy was developed following a comprehensive analysis of local need and significant public consultation. It was approved by Cabinet in October 2020 and adopted by Council in November 2020, providing the framework for modernising library services across the Borough. It set out an ambitious plan to improve library buildings and facilities, strengthen community partnerships, increase digital inclusion, and deliver cultural and learning opportunities for residents.
- 1.4.2 The Strategy aligns with key Council priorities, including the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, Cultural Strategy, Economic Growth Strategy, Customer Access Strategy, Digital Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy, as well as national priorities through the Libraries Connected Universal Offers which focus on Reading, Culture and Creativity, Information and Digital and Health and Wellbeing.

1.5 Performance Review

- 1.5.1 This report demonstrates that the majority of actions and objectives within the 2021–2026 Strategy have been achieved, contributing significantly to the Council's ambitions for thriving neighbourhoods, cultural engagement, health and wellbeing, and digital inclusion.

1.6 Proposed Next Steps

- 1.6.1 Approval is sought to undertake a borough-wide public consultation to inform the development of a new Library Strategy for 2027–2032 and a future service delivery model for Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs. This consultation will ensure that the next Strategy reflects community priorities, addresses areas of underperformance, and continues to align with statutory obligations and Council objectives. It will also provide an opportunity to consider how libraries can best support thriving neighbourhoods, digital inclusion, cultural engagement, and health and wellbeing in a sustainable way.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Review of the 2021–2026 Library Strategy

2.1.1 The Library Strategy 2021–2026 provided a clear and ambitious framework for transforming library services across the Borough, built around seven key objectives:

- **Creative and Cultural Enrichment** – Position libraries as vibrant cultural hubs through events, partnerships, and community-led activities.
- **Increasing Reading and Literacy** – Inspire reading for pleasure and lifelong learning through campaigns, challenges, and targeted support.
- **Improved Digital Access and Literacy** – Bridge the digital divide with upgraded technology, makerspaces, and digital inclusion initiatives.
- **Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential** – Support education, skills, and employability through learning programmes and business support.
- **Healthier and Happier Lives** – Promote wellbeing through inclusive spaces, health partnerships, and creative health initiatives.
- **Greater Prosperity** – Contribute to economic growth through investment in modern facilities and regeneration projects.
- **Stronger, More Resilient Communities** – Strengthen community cohesion through partnerships, co-location, and outreach.

2.1.2 Progress against Strategic Outcomes:

1. Creative and Cultural Enrichment

- Libraries evolved into cultural hubs with events like Fun Palaces (expanded from 3 in 2019 to 17 in 2025, attracting 800+ attendees annually).
- Participated in borough-wide cultural programmes (e.g. Children's Capital of Culture).
- Introduced reading gardens, pop-up exhibitions, and creative partnerships such as Flux Rotherham.
- Increased community-led activities and outreach to underrepresented groups (e.g., BAME, disabled residents, Ukrainian community).

"It was fantastic! It brought together members of the community who don't usually get the opportunity to get together. I spent time with people of all ages and I think one or two re-discovered their passions because they

had the chance to try out some activities that they hadn't done for a while. Today, I really felt that I had something to offer my community, and that it was valued by those who participated"

Fun Palace Participant

2. Increasing Reading and Literacy

- Reading for pleasure among young people increased by 156% (target exceeded).
- Expanded Summer Reading Challenge (1,025 finishers) and launched new reading groups.
- Strengthened school engagement through class visits and pop-up libraries.
- Introduced targeted literacy support for early years children from families where English is an Additional Language (EAL).
- Book borrowing remains below target (5.7% vs 8.8% national average).

"It was a great event to celebrate the achievements of our children"

Parent, Summer Reading Challenge event at Magna

3. Improved Digital Access and Literacy

- Upgraded ICT infrastructure, installed Open+ technology, and introduced Makerspaces . A Makerspace is a collaborative area where people can learn, create and share using tools and technology such as 3D printers, VR, coding kits, and digital equipment supporting creativity, STEAM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) and digital inclusion.
- Supported the Council's commitment to reduce digital exclusion by distributing 1,234 SIM cards and 50 tablets to vulnerable residents.
- Digital membership and e-resource use grew significantly.
- Recognised nationally for strong digital inclusion work (Good Things Foundation study).

"The doctor told me to join this group and it is the best thing I have ever done...The library is a good place to keep warm, to meet other people and you can bring kids because they've got a nice area for them to read and do activities. The staff are really helpful and I am going to come on a course to learn how to use computers."

Participant, Maltby Library and Neighbourhood Hub

4. Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential

- Delivered coding clubs, homework support, and employability programmes.
- Supported entrepreneurs via Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC).
- Partnered with Pathways to Employment and Source Skills Academy for job clubs and confidence-building workshops.

"The customer and myself went to the Library who supported us with scanning the 5 page document. At this point she also signed him up for a

Library card. Customer Service skills were superb, the customer's first language was not English, so afforded him the time and gave clear, concise information/advice. Contributed to the customer having an excellent customer experience, not only that, I had a great experience, where a fellow RMBC staff member demonstrated the customer service skills we love to see."

RMBC Officer

5. Healthier and Happier Lives

- Created autism-friendly spaces in multiple libraries.
- Hosted mental health exhibitions and wellbeing events.
- Provided warm spaces during the cost-of-living crisis and supported Covid testing during the pandemic.
- Introduced health-focused groups (e.g., Menopause Cafés, Shared Reading).

"The Menopause Café is such a supportive environment—I felt heard and learned so much from others going through similar experiences it really does make it easier knowing you are not suffering alone"

Mowbray Gardens Library participant

6. Greater Prosperity

- Began construction of the new Central Library (opening Autumn 2026) as part of the Town Centre Masterplan.
- Strengthened partnerships with employment services and delivered job clubs and digital skills sessions.

"The job clubs at the library have been a huge help—I've learned how to improve my CV and feel more confident applying for roles"

Job Club participant

7. Stronger, More Resilient Communities

- Invested more than £1.5m in refurbishments and £540,000 in IT upgrades.
- Rolled out Open+ at Mowbray Gardens and planned for Brinsworth in December 2025.
- Co-located libraries with other services (e.g., Early Help at Kiveton Park).
- Increased community engagement through events and partnerships with Parish Councils.
- Volunteering hours declined following the Covid-19 pandemic, despite ongoing recruitment efforts.

"Swinton's refurbishment of the old customer services building into a new library have made such a difference—the space feels modern, comfortable, and welcoming and the reading garden is a wonderful addition"

Library Member, Swinton

“Thank you for letting me volunteer here, everyone I have worked with are all so welcoming and kind and you make our community better”

Volunteer

2.3 Performance Targets

2.3.1 The 2021–2026 Library Strategy established a set of measurable targets to ensure progress could be tracked and evaluated throughout the five-year period. These targets were designed to reflect the service’s priorities and demonstrate the value and impact of libraries across Rotherham. Progress was monitored via monthly dashboards in collaboration with the Performance and Improvement Team.

2.3.2 The table below summarises progress against each target:

Target	Status
Increase the Number of People Who Borrow Books by 10%	Target not on track
Increase the number of library visitors by 10%	Target not on track
Increase reading for pleasure among young people (ages 0–25) by 25%	Target met
Increase the number and range of activities and groups by 10%	Target met
Increase the number of people using IT facilities by 10%	Target met
Increase Self-Service Take-Up by 20%	Target met
Increase the Number of Volunteering Hours by 50%	Target not on track
Maintain customer satisfaction above 95%	Target met
Trial technology which will allow customers to access libraries without staff being present in order to increase opening hours	Target met
Be able to evidence the impact and value that libraries bring to communities through case studies and testimonials	Target met

2.3.3 Seven out of ten targets have been met. Appendix 3 - Library Strategy Performance Against Objectives and Targets provides further detail, outlining performance to date against the key objectives and targets as set out in the Strategy.

2.4 Local Context and Future Strategy – Libraries as Neighbourhood Hubs

“A library in the middle of a community is a cross between an emergency exit, a life-raft and a festival. They are cathedrals of the mind; hospitals of the soul; theme parks of the imagination.”

Caitlin Moran, Writer and Broadcaster

2.4.1 The 2021 – 2026 Strategy envisioned libraries as neighbourhood hubs, worthy of investment to cement their role as community living-rooms, where residents can connect, share experiences and learn – both individually and together. The increase in visits to neighbourhood libraries and the wide range of services and activities delivered through libraries, as set out in Appendix 3, suggests that residents recognise libraries as trusted local spaces. In a fast-changing world, they can both

help people keep up, find joy and escape, be safe spaces for healthy debate, build connections, forge friendships, and develop a sense of belonging.

- 2.4.2 Rotherham Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs support a range of Council priorities. Libraries strengthen the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy by creating inclusive spaces for community activity. They support the delivery of the Customer Access Strategy, promoting a digital-first approach by enabling residents to self-serve online while offering assisted digital support for those who need help. Libraries also play a key role in delivering the Digital Strategy, helping bridge the digital divide and improve skills.
- 2.4.3 As places for reading, writing, theatre, music, art, making, and entertainment, libraries contribute to the Cultural Strategy (2019–2026), which will be refreshed for 2027–2034, by helping to widen access to cultural opportunities and experiences. They have a key role to play in Creative Health – utilising creative and cultural engagement to improve people’s mental health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and supporting the Five Ways to Wellbeing – which underpins so much of Rotherham’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Furthermore, they assist Adult Social Care and Housing by providing trusted, community-based spaces that promote independence and inclusion.
- 2.4.4 Through reading materials, IT and a range of courses and classes, libraries are equipped to support education in its broadest sense, aligning with priorities for children and young people embedded in the Council Plan, offering opportunities for informal and intergenerational learning. Schools’ visits and the Schools Loan Service support students to learn at every key stage, across the whole curriculum, underpinned by literacy honed through reading for pleasure. The co-location of the youth centre and Kiveton Library has enabled closer working between Library Services and Early Help.
- 2.4.5 By helping individuals develop skills and become job-ready, libraries are already supporting delivery of the new Economic Growth Plan – Forging Ahead (2025–2030) and further partnership-working with Pathways to Work and Employment Solutions will increase libraries impact in this critical area.
- 2.4.6 As neighbourhood hubs, libraries also host a range of activities in collaboration with other services, the voluntary sector and other public sector agencies, such as the Department for Work and Pensions, South Yorkshire Housing Association, Citizens Advice and RNN (Rotherham College). These include courses and classes, help with benefits, advice sessions and consultation events, including Ward Member surgeries.
- 2.4.7 Whilst much has been achieved in libraries’ role as neighbourhood hubs, there is still much to be done. This is particularly in relation to how staff work with residents, empowering residents to have a voice in decision-making beyond the development of the Library Strategy itself and working

with residents to build on their strengths and find solutions to local problems. Volunteering is one way of achieving this, but more needs to be done here. Libraries' engagement in the delivery of the Children's Capital of Culture programme, has helped to build co-production skills with library staff, and further training will ensure that more library staff are confident in working in this way.

"Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities"

R. David Lankes, Professor of Librarianship, University of Texas

- 2.4.8 Following consultation, Cabinet and Council will be asked to consider and approve a refreshed Library Strategy. To ensure the Strategy places communities at the heart of decision-making, it is essential to undertake a comprehensive review of current provision and re-assess local need. This process will identify opportunities to enhance or amend the core service offer and ensure alignment with changing expectations of service users and non-users, the evolving nature of reading and information delivery, Rotherham's demographic profile, and the financial context within which the service operates. A robust needs assessment will form the foundation of this review, providing evidence to inform future priorities. It will highlight gaps in provision, barriers to access, and areas of underperformance, ensuring that the next Strategy is built on clear data and community insight.
- 2.4.9 In an era of misinformation and rapid change, libraries remain trusted sources of knowledge, helping communities to develop skills and confidence. By working with partners and stakeholders across Rotherham, and ensuring that residents are at the heart of service planning, delivery and evaluation, the Council can ensure that libraries and neighbourhood hubs are vital to the development of neighbourhoods as thriving places where people can achieve a good quality of life, feel safe and be proud of where they live.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Three options were considered in relation to the development of the new Library Strategy for 2027–2032.
- 3.1.1 **Option 1: Undertake a Public Consultation**
This option involves engaging with residents, staff and stakeholders to inform the development of the new Strategy and future service delivery model. It ensures the Strategy reflects community needs, supports continuous improvement, and aligns with Council priorities and national frameworks. In addition to the consultation, this approach will also draw on internal data, performance reviews and officer expertise to provide a robust evidence base for decision-making. This is the recommended option.
- 3.1.2 **Option 2: Develop the Strategy Internally Without Consultation**
This approach would rely solely on internal data, performance reviews, and officer expertise to shape the new Strategy. While it may be more

time-efficient, it risks overlooking community priorities and missing opportunities for co-design and innovation. It may also reduce public buy-in and limit the Strategy's effectiveness.

3.1.3 **Option 3: Do Nothing**

This option would mean keeping the current Library Strategy without making any updates or revisions. While this approach avoids the resource and time commitment of developing a new Strategy, it risks the service becoming outdated and misaligned with evolving community needs, Council priorities, and national frameworks.

4 Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The purpose of the consultation is to gather views from residents, stakeholders, and partners to ensure the refreshed Library Strategy reflects community priorities, addresses areas of underperformance, and supports continuous improvement. It will also explore opportunities to modernise the service offer, including technology, co-location, and enhanced digital access.
- 4.2 The scope of the consultation will include understanding barriers to library use and book borrowing. It will explore how libraries can promote reading for pleasure, support literacy development, and engage underrepresented groups.
 - 4.2.1 An example of this ambition is the National Year of Reading 2026, a landmark initiative led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) under the banner *Stories That Connect Us*. Rotherham Libraries will deliver a borough-wide programme celebrating storytelling in all its forms, aiming to embed reading into everyday life and create a lasting legacy.
- 4.3 A range of engagement methods will be used, including online and face-to-face surveys, focus groups, targeted events, and outreach through library sites and community networks. There will be a particular focus on engaging underrepresented groups such as young people, men, BAME communities, and people who self-identify as disabled. Evidence from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) shows that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly less likely to use libraries compared to more affluent groups, often due to barriers such as lack of awareness, digital exclusion and competing life pressures (*DCSM/Ipsos, What Works to Engage Library Non-Users, 2025*). The service will also be targeting this group as part of the engagement approach to ensure the Strategy addresses inequality and improves access for all.
- 4.4 The consultation will be aligned with Rotherham Council's corporate strategies and national frameworks, including the Libraries Connected Universal Offers. In line with the Council's strengths-based approach, it will focus on building upon the assets, skills, and aspirations within

communities to co-create a library service that reflects local priorities and empowers residents.

4.5 Feedback will be sought across the following areas:

- **Vision and Priorities** – The overall vision for the libraries and neighbourhood hubs service and key priorities for the next five years.
- **Service Areas and Community Needs** – Which aspects of the service are most important, including reading and literacy, digital access, health and wellbeing, cultural activities, learning opportunities, and community support.
- **Current Usage and Access** – How people currently use libraries, what services they value most, and what changes would encourage greater use.
- **Future Service Options** – Potential developments such as technology enhancements, co-location with other services, volunteering opportunities, and alternative service models.
- **Role in the Community** – Perspectives on libraries as community hubs and suggestions for additional services or activities.
- **Equality and Inclusion** – Ensuring the service meets the needs of all residents and identifying barriers to access or participation.
- **Digital and Outreach Services** – Opinions on online library services, schools loan service, home library service, and how these could be improved.
- **Demographic Information** – Collecting data to understand the reach and impact of the service across different groups.

4.6 In addition, the Strategy will consider the following priority areas:

- Widening access and inclusion, addressing barriers for under-represented groups and expanding outreach.
- Promoting literacy and reading for pleasure, improving book borrowing and circulation.
- Supporting skills, lifelong learning, and economic growth, including employability and digital literacy.
- Enhancing libraries as community hubs, supporting social connection, cultural engagement, and volunteering.

4.7 The consultation will use a combination of structured and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative feedback. This input

will directly inform the draft vision, strategic priorities, and service model for the new Library Strategy.

- 4.8 The Assistant Director of Culture, Sport and Tourism will formally notify the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) of the intention to consult and the potential for future changes to service provision, in accordance with statutory expectations.
- 4.9 Following the consultation, a further report will be brought to Cabinet presenting the draft Library Strategy 2027–2032, identifying potential service improvements, community priorities, and opportunities for greater efficiency and impact.

5 Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Service recognises the importance of engaging with communities at the earliest stage in shaping the future library Strategy. Early engagement will ensure that decisions are informed by local priorities and evidence, supporting the development of a modern, effective library offer that meets statutory obligations and community expectations.

- 5.1.1 The key milestone dates for the development of the Library Strategy and the final service delivery model are outlined below:

- **January 2026 – DCMS Notification & Consultation Planning**
Notify DCMS of intention to consult; develop consultation plan; begin internal planning for assessment of need.
- **February – July 2026 – Public Consultation (Phase 1)** Launch borough-wide consultation; engage stakeholders including staff and Trade Unions; promote widely; gather insights on service satisfaction, emerging needs, modernisation, opening hours, self-access, volunteering, co-location, and aspirations for the new Town Centre Library; complete assessment of need.
- **August – October 2026 – Analysis and Draft Strategy Development** Analyse consultation feedback and assessment findings; draft new Library Strategy; test and refine draft with stakeholders; notify DCMS of potential changes to service delivery.
- **October 2026 – Launch of New Town Centre Library** Open flagship library; showcase modern facilities; promote draft Strategy and future vision.
- **November 2026 – Cabinet Report (Phase 2 Engagement Approval)** Present draft Library Strategy and proposed service delivery model to Cabinet; seek approval for second-phase engagement.
- **November 2026 – January 2027 – Public Consultation (Phase 2)** - Conduct second-phase engagement on draft Strategy and final

service offer; analyse feedback; update equality impact assessment.

- **November 2026 – January 2027** - Budget implications to be considered as part of the annual budget setting process.
- **February 2027** – Produce engagement analysis report; finalise Library Strategy, revised service offer, and associated budget implications; staff and Trade Union engagement on revised service structure.
- **March 2027** – Request Cabinet approval of the Library Strategy and final service offer.
- **April 2027** - Request Full Council approval of the Library Strategy and final service offer.

6 Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The current approved net revenue budget for the Library Service is £3 million. It is anticipated that the majority of the consultation activity will be delivered by staff within the Culture, Sport and Tourism Service and primarily communicated through digital channels, with any minor ancillary costs (such as printing) absorbed within existing approved revenue budgets. Where meetings are required, these will be held in Council-owned buildings wherever possible to avoid additional expenditure.
- 6.1.1 Any budgetary implications, capital and revenue, that arise through the consultation process and the development of the new Strategy, will be considered as part of the Council's annual budget setting process.
- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report. If there is a need to procure goods, works or services from third party suppliers to support the consultation process, these must be procured in compliance with the relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023 subject to the route to market undertaken) as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7 Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council has a statutory duty to provide a *“comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.”* In fulfilling this duty, the Council must ensure access to a sufficient range and quality of books, printed materials, and other resources, and encourage both adults and children to make full use of the service, including providing advice and bibliographical information. A failure to comply with this statutory duty could lead to a complaint being made to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

7.2 The Council must also comply with the Equality Act 2010:

- Section 149 – Public Sector Equality Duty is in force and requires the Council to have due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
- Protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership.
- This duty involves removing or minimising disadvantages for those with protected characteristics, meeting the different needs of those with protected characteristics, encouraging participation in public life where it is disproportionately low, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.3 The consultation proposed within this report recommends utilising several methods to engage residents and will specifically seek views from under-represented groups. This would assist the Council in demonstrating compliance with its Public Sector Equality Duty and also inform the most appropriate ways to meet its statutory obligations under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

8 Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

Should any Human Resources matters arise from any future proposals resulting from the consultation, the Council will follow due processes.

9 Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The proposed consultation and development of a new Library Strategy for 2027–2032 will have direct implications for children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs play a vital role in supporting early years development, literacy, digital inclusion, and social connection for these groups.

9.2 The current Strategy places a strong focus on children and families within its core offer, committing to increase activities for children and families, promote reading and literacy for all ages, and support cultural engagement through partnerships such as the Cultural Partnership Board.

9.3 The consultation will seek to understand how services can better meet the needs of children and young people, particularly in relation to reading

for pleasure, homework support, and safe, inclusive spaces for learning and creativity. It will also explore how libraries can strengthen their role in safeguarding and supporting vulnerable adults, including those experiencing isolation, mental health challenges, or digital exclusion.

- 9.4 This work aligns with the Council Plan 2025–2030 and the Children and Young People’s Partnership priorities, which aim to ensure children and young people are healthy, safe from harm, ready to learn for life, and prepared for the world of work. Libraries contribute to these outcomes by providing safe spaces, early literacy programmes, homework support, and cultural enrichment.
- 9.5 The consultation and future proposals will also build on the legacy of Rotherham’s Children’s Capital of Culture 2025 festival year, which placed children and young people at the heart of cultural decision-making. This legacy includes commitments to sustain creative learning opportunities, co-created activities, and cultural engagement beyond 2025, ensuring libraries remain key venues for creativity, skills development, and inclusive participation.
- 9.6 Future delivery models could include activities co-created with children and young people, as well as co-located and co-delivered services to enhance accessibility and engagement.

10 Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 An equality analysis will be undertaken on any proposals. Initial screening is at Appendix 4 – Part A, and a full Equality Analysis Form is at Appendix 5 – Part B.
- 10.2 The Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs Strategy aims to provide a comprehensive and efficient service for all, addressing protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and carers, as well as socio-economic factors. Libraries offer safe, accessible spaces, free digital access, and inclusive resources in line with national Universal Offers and the Future Libraries Project.
- 10.3 The consultation will seek views from under-represented groups to inform a revised Equality Action Plan, ensuring barriers are addressed and services remain inclusive and equitable.

11 Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 An initial assessment is provided in Appendix 6. The proposed consultation and new Library Strategy (2027–2032) is expected to have minimal impact on carbon emissions. Potential effects include:
- **Buildings:** Longer opening hours for some libraries; mitigated by heating and lighting only when needed and monitoring usage.

- **Transport:** Minor increase in staff and visitor travel; mitigated by local delivery, active travel promotion, and car sharing.
- **Waste:** Small-scale events may generate limited waste; mitigated by using recyclable materials and avoiding single-use plastics.

11.2 Libraries also support climate resilience by offering safe spaces during extreme weather, integrating health and wellbeing services, and creating green spaces. Recent refurbishments and co-location improve energy efficiency, while digital services reduce paper use and staff travel. Overall, impacts are minimal, with mitigation and monitoring measures in place.

12 Implications for Partners

12.1 Targeted consultation will take place with a range of Council services, alongside engagement with Asset Management, to identify opportunities for co-location of services within library buildings and to explore ways to further develop the local library offer. This approach will ensure that libraries are integrated into the wider neighbourhood hub model, creating efficiencies, improving access to services, and strengthening partnerships across health, education, culture, and customer access.

13 Risks and Mitigation

13.1 To ensure robust decision-making, proposals for consultation must consider statutory obligations, resource availability, and the needs of all communities, including vulnerable groups. The following risks and mitigations have been identified:

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to meet statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964	Extensive engagement before implementing the final Library Strategy and service offer. DCMS kept informed throughout.
Reputational damage	Full public consultation on the proposed Strategy and service model.
Low response rate or limited engagement in consultation	Use multiple channels (online, in-person, social media, community events). Targeted outreach to underrepresented groups. Accessible formats and clear messaging.
Misinterpretation or misinformation about proposals	Publish clear, consistent information. Provide dedicated contact points. Monitor social media.

Accessibility barriers for vulnerable groups

Offer alternative formats (easy-read, large print, translations). Provide assisted digital support. Engage community partners to reach those with limited digital access.

Delays in consultation process impacting Strategy timeline

Develop detailed project plan with contingency time. Assign clear responsibilities and monitor progress regularly.

14 Accountable Officers

Polly Hamilton, Assistant Director of Culture, Sport and Tourism
Zoe Oxley, Head of Operations and Business Transformation

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	26/11/25
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	25/11/25
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	24/11/25

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